Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages | Commissariat aux langues officielles

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New reorganization of Fisheries and Oceans in the Maritimes: a step in the right direction according to the Commissioner of Official Languages

The Commissioner of Official Languages, Dr. Dyane Adam, was very interested in the Fisheries and Oceans decision to create an Oceans sector for the Gulf region, making it a full-fledged region, on an equal footing with all Fisheries and Oceans regions.

In 1996, the Commissioner of Official Languages published an investigation report regarding complaints about the reorganization of Fisheries and Oceans in the Maritimes. These complaints were made by associations representing Francophone interests in the region, especially the association representing the interests of fishermen. The complainants maintained that the transfer of decision making authority from Moncton to Halifax would be detrimental to the development of the Acadian community, fisheries being one of the only growth sectors over which the Acadian community has control. They also feared that the Fisheries and Oceans office in Halifax would be unable to offer adequate services in French to New Brunswick Francophones, who have rights with regard to their language of work. The Commissioner's investigation concluded that Fisheries and Oceans did not, in its regional reorganization, fully respect the language requirements of the *Official Languages Act* as regards the development and growth of linguistic communities.

The language issue had been a major consideration in the creation of the Gulf region in 1981, which was managed from the administrative centre in Moncton. This new regional administration had improved the level of service to the Acadian community. With the reorganization in the 90s, administration was transfered from Moncton to Halifax, leaving the Gulf region with weakened powers.

The Commissioner is pleased with the Fisheries and Oceans announcement although she considers it too early to express full satisfaction with this decision, as it has come a full five years after the investigation report. "The impact of this decision on language rights remains to be seen, but it is certainly a step in the right direction, especially in terms of respect for the language rights of Fisheries and Oceans employees and services to the Acadian community. I also hope that, through this decision, Fisheries and Oceans is affirming its obligation to foster the growth and development of Francophone minorities, as provided in section 41 of the *Official Languages Act*", stated Dr. Adam.

The impact of government transformations on language rights has been of concern to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for several years. "Federal institutions must ensure that their administrative reorganizations do not in any way undermine language rights", Dr. Adam concluded.

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Commissioner's Representatives, Atlantic Region

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